

ADDRESSING REENTRY EXPERIENCES IN CALIFORNIA DURING COVID-19

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ADDRESSING REENTRY EXPERIENCES IN CALIFORNIA DURING COVID-19

Since enrolling at Cal Poly, my projected career path has changed many times. I began intent on pursuing a career in forensic anthropology, but then became interested in using behavioral anthropology and psychology as a profiler in the FBI. In the past academic year, my plans have changed once again—as I have decided to focus on a career in criminal law. Until I began taking criminal justice courses, I was hesitant to become a part of a system full of problems that I thought I could never fully understand or change. Learning and having discussions with students and educators who want to fix the criminal justice system has altered my initial perceptions and changed my career path.

My senior capstone project, as well as my chosen career path, was deeply inspired by a criminal reentry simulation that I took part in during the fall quarter of this academic year (See Glaser, 2006; Moak, Walker, Earwood, and Towery, 2019; Marcum, 2017). In this simulation, we were given new identities as people who have just been released from incarceration. In the course of four weeks (each week lasted 15 minutes), we had to complete tasks recently released offenders face. Truthfully, I didn't believe that it would be very difficult until we began. There were minimal instructions, the workers of the simulation were often hostile or unhelpful, and there were far too many people trying to get the same tasks accomplished that it was nearly impossible to complete the necessary requirements week to week. As one of my peers stated, “the entire design of the simulation seemed to be centered around workers either not wanting, or not caring for the success of these ex-convicts who were actually making an attempt to turn their lives around and get back on the right track” (Participant 13). Almost everyone in the class had returned to jail by the time the fourth week had ended. In the simulation debriefing, I was

informed that this is how reentering society truly feels and that it was not a dramatization, and my heart sank. I became furious. I knew that I wanted to learn more and do something about it.

I will first provide a literature review surrounding the topic of reentry and recidivism. Next, I will describe the projects that I completed related to reentry and reintegration in California including: participating in various parts of an educational reentry simulation, analyzing student responses to participation in this simulation, organizing a care package drive to assist those recently released, and creating a resource website compiling updates on the COVID-19 crisis inside of the California incarceration system. I conclude by reflecting on my senior project experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

About 95% of those incarcerated will be released at some point during their lifetime (Hughes and Wilson, 2020; Vance, Richards, and Oliva, 2019; James, 2015; Braga, Piehl, Hureau 2008). This release is often facilitated through the form of parole, which provides conditions and requirements that the released offender must meet to stay out of incarceration. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that only 41% of those released were successful in abiding by the terms of their release (Hughes and Wilson, 2020). This problem still remains without a truly effective solution, despite attempts to restructure and reform this system.

Nationally, over 45,000 people were released from federal incarceration in 2018, and almost 4,000 of those were from California alone (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2020). If approximately 75% are rearrested and nearly 60% are reconvicted (James, 2015), about 33,750 of those released from federal incarceration in a single year will be rearrested and about 20,250 of those will be reconvicted and serving another sentence by 2024. This data is low, as it doesn't

include state prison releases, which were over 591,000 in 2001 alone (Hughes and Wilson, 2020). Despite the vast numbers of people released each year, “after walking out of the prison gates, they struggle to meet their basic needs, such as finding housing and unemployment and reuniting with their families. They must restart their lives, often in similar or worse structural circumstances than prior to their incarceration” (Opsal, 299, 2011). Providing activities and programs before offenders are released better prepares them to “return safely to the community and live as law-abiding citizens” (James, 12, 2015).

Without successful programs and support, we risk the possibility of increased recidivism, or “a person’s relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime” (National Institute of Justice, 1, 2020). In 2018, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that about 33% of admissions to state prisons in that year were due to “violations of post-custody supervision and [...] returns from conditional release.” (Carson, 2018, 1). In a longitudinal study conducted by the Bureau of Justice statistics from 2005 to 2014, they found that “about four in nine (44%) prisoners released in 2005 were arrested at least once during their first year after release. About one in three (34%) were arrested during their third year after release, and nearly one in four (24%) were arrested during their ninth year” (Alper, Durose, and Markman, 1, 2018).

Significant costs accompany this cycle of reentry and recidivism that, if redirected towards programs designed to rehabilitate and support these offenders, would help the problem tenfold. Prisons “must provide [...] adequate levels of security; program and administrative staff to run facilities [...], food and programming for the people under their care, including sufficient recreational and educational opportunities; infrastructure maintenance and upkeep” (Mai and Subramanian, 1, 2017). This is very expensive for the ever-expanding prison population, with a

national average of about \$43 billion dollars going towards this institution annually (Mai and Subramanian, 1, 2017). There are two measures to visualize this spending; the first is the average cost per inmate, which takes the “total state spending on prisons and divides it by the average daily prison population” (Mai and Subramanian, 1, 2017). The average cost per inmate in the U.S. is about \$33,000 (Mai and Subramanian, 2017). A second way to visualize this spending is the annual cost per state resident, which, on average is \$137 per person (Mai and Subramanian, 2017). Of this spending, almost 70% is funded towards personnel costs instead of welfare and rehabilitation of those incarcerated (Mai and Subramanian, 2017). Each year a person returns to incarceration after their initial sentence instead of becoming an active part of the community and workforce is another year of money (whichever way it is visualized) that does not go towards anything else for the community.

Even with all this money being spent, those participating in reentry are provided with little, if any support in the process of reintegrating into regular society comfortably. This lack of resources makes it all the more difficult to stay out of incarceration, where these immense worries of maintaining life in society can essentially disappear. When (or if), these overwhelming needs are met, those reentering are then faced with many more fundamental problems that bar them from obtaining a successful reentry like the issue of concentrated disadvantage, social stigma, and lack of funding to necessary resources that they need.

Most of those being released are returned back to a small number of communities that pose high risk for recidivism (Morenoff and Harding, 2014; Brazzel, Crayton, Mukamai, Solomon, and Lindahl, 2009). This high risk for recidivism comes from the phenomenon of “concentrated disadvantage,” or places where the majority of families are below the poverty line, have high unemployment, and a low median income (Hipp, Petersilia, and Turner, 2010). In a

study on factors affecting the likelihood of reentry success, Hipp and colleagues found that higher rates of concentrated disadvantage greatly increase recidivism. They also found that higher concentrated disadvantage in neighboring tracts increased the probability of recidivating (Hipp, et al., 2010). In addition, obtaining stable housing is a very high predictor of success with reentry (Walter, Viglione and Tillyer, 2017). However, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 banned people with felonies from living in public housing, meaning recently released offenders often could not live with their own family members. In these highly concentrated areas of disparity, the ability to get constructive social support, steady employment, or adequate resources in the communities that they return to is diminished and therefore reduces the likelihood of successful reentry.

Proximity and access to funded and functional resources is yet another barrier in the way of reentry. Petersilia (2001) found that the growth in mass incarceration was not only increasing the number of people in prisons but also resulted in more people being released from prison each year. Hipp, Petersilia, and Turner found in their study on recidivism in California that decreasing the services offered to recently released offenders can increase the likelihood of recidivism by about 37% (2010). They also found that when no services are offered nearby, an African American parolee is 46% more likely to recidivate— “as another way of viewing these results, an African American with seven service providers nearby has the same risk of recidivating as a White parolee with no service providers nearby” (Hipp, et al., 2010, 968).

Support and funding for parole officers and reentry programs has not increased even though more people are being released annually (Petersilia, 2001). Petersilia (2001) highlights the impact of the shift from indeterminate to determinate sentencing practices on offender release. Adequate review from a parole board is required to assess altered behavioral patterns

and the mental state of the person being released for indeterminate or early release. Release is mandatory at the end of a determinate sentence; therefore, this vigorous review often lacks because it does not alter whether or not they are released. This lack of review affects the support that is deemed necessary for those who are released (Petersilia, 2001), which then affects location and amounts of service provided in specific communities.

Having a label like the one of ex-convict or being socially categorized as a felon truly affects the way you are treated when reentering society, because being branded a criminal “is not just a reflection of one’s past misdeeds but is also a prediction of future behavior” (Opsal, 299, 2011). It is not uncommon to see a question on a job application asking about the conviction history of the applicant. California has recently passed assembly bill 1008, or “Ban the Box,” to stop this question from being asked in the hiring process, but this is not the case in most states. Devah Pager’s (2003) research demonstrates the negative impact a criminal record has on the hiring process. She found white applicants with a criminal record were less likely to receive callbacks than white applicants without records, but they were still more likely to receive callbacks than Black applicants without criminal records (Pager 2003).

Being labeled a “criminal” tends to overshadow other important aspects of personal identity not just for the self but also within social contexts. Degrading or denouncing someone socially creates an identity that is, to the rest of society, completely different and new (Garfinkel, 1956). Through multiple interviews with women following their first year of release, Opsal examined strategies they used to cope with the label of “parolee” and their hardships reentering society. Women detached themselves from this negative label by using “resistant thinking” and by making their identity as mothers more salient (Opsal, 2011). Motherhood was something that many used to motivate themselves to resist recidivism; however, they found that challenges of

motherhood were complicated by parolee stigma, especially custody situations. One woman experiencing reentry stated: “It’s like everyone is offering you help as far as the [criminal justice system], but they don’t take it farther than that for a mother, a mom” (Opsal, 307, 2011).

Understanding the needs of individuals, not just seeing them as ex-convicts, is crucial to successful reentry. Having support and resources available to help offenders construct positive identities and destigmatizing criminal offenders is essential for community reintegration.

In light of all these obstacles, many people are working to find resolutions that both rehabilitate and support those released. Vance, Richards, and Oliva (2019:10) followed someone who had been released and he states his “reentry success was a result of the education foundation I obtained while incarcerated, family, and loved ones.” So few inmates receive access to college education behind bars despite research indicating that it reduces recidivism and increases employment opportunities after release (Brazzel, et al., 2009).

Many scholars and activists are focused on criminal justice reform, specifically restorative justice efforts, which are “a set of practices or processes characterized by the collaborative problem-solving effort of all the parties with a stake in a particular offense or a penal philosophy, a set of values or a way of thinking about how to view and respond to crime” (Maruna, 289, 2016). Restorative justice is accomplished through processes like empowerment models, reframing agents of change, recognizing the power of giving back, and creating a belief in redeemability (Maruna, 2016). For example, the Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI) works to prevent former violent offenders from engaging in criminal behavior by helping them every step of the way through their transition (Braga, 2008). Targeting younger males in Boston that are most likely to commit violent crimes, BRI provides each with a mentor and extensive case management from the day of release in hopes of preventing recidivism (Braga, 2008). It was

found that BRI participants were 30% less likely than the average population to have been rearrested for a violent crime within the years following their release (Braga, 2008).

Another way to improve the reentry process for offenders would be to change the perception that community members hold of offenders. By understanding community members' attitudes about offenders, we can better address myths and ideas about reoffending. Park (2009) found non-white college students who grew up in urban neighborhoods, were democrats, and non-Christians held positive attitudes towards prisoners and reentry; whereas white, Christian, republican, and suburban students were more likely to have negative attitudes towards prisoners and reentry. While the effectiveness of any single solution is still being debated and no one clear path has proved entirely effective, steps are being taken to help address reentry.

Over the course of two quarters, I worked closely with this issue in three separate ways to help myself and others understand this problem better and to begin to take steps to implement change. I first became involved with various aspects of a reentry simulation. I was an active participant, a booth worker, and I analyzed student responses to this simulation to gain even more insight. I also attempted to organize a drive event to collect essential personal items to donate to those being released. Finally, I created a website that compiles various materials in order to have a resource on how the COVID-19 crisis is affecting the California justice system.

PARTICIPATION IN REENTRY SIMULATION

The initial piece of my capstone project began when I participated in a reentry simulation as part of Crime & Violence class with Dr. Parrotta, which was hosted with Dr. Kimberlynn Reeves from the US Attorney's Office for the District of Delaware. In the days leading up to this simulation, we were only told that we were going to be participating in a simulation of what it is

like to be released from prison. The entire class was clueless about what this truly meant and had no idea what to expect. When I arrived, I was told to check in and was given a folder of resources that pertained to my new life. The folder contained a “life card,” a sheet that informed me of my new identity: what my new name was, what my offense was, what my living situation would be, and the terms of my parole. We were told to sit down and were given a brief introduction where we learned we were role playing recently released offenders. We would have four, 15 minute “weeks” to complete everything on our card and stay out of jail.

After this vague set of directions, we were told to start. Nobody had any idea what to do, but we scattered across the service stations that lined the exterior walls of the room. Panic and frenzy filled the air. I remember sitting for a moment, stunned by the sudden commotion. My first instinct was to move through my list of necessary tasks from top to bottom. When I went to complete my first task, I was turned away because I didn’t have a state ID or another form of identification. After getting turned away, I frantically began to look for where to complete this task so that I could go on with my week. By the time I found the booth, almost half of my class was already in line, and the booth member was moving very slowly. I became furious and ultimately spent the rest of my first week waiting in line for identification.

At the start of week two, almost everybody ran back to the identification booth. Only the first few to that booth in the prior week or those whose life cards indicated that they already had proper identification were roaming to other booths. I was jealous of people who had already completed this task and began to feel anxious while looking at the list of things I needed to complete: get a job, collect money from this job to pay rent, attend AA, and get a drug test, just to name a few. After spending almost half the time for this week in line, I tried to get a drug test and failed. I then went to go get a job and was denied. I was going crazy with frustration. It was

at this point that I looked around and saw about a quarter of my class already back in “jail.” I pushed through and waited in line to complete another task but before I was able to reach the front of the line the week was up. I had gone two weeks and had not completed a single task.

Week three began and almost immediately I was asked to show my parole officer my card and because I had nothing completed, I was put back in jail. I was horrified being dragged towards the stage where the rest of my classmates were— I felt like a failure. After sitting down and being able to observe for a while, I found that I grateful to be back in jail, something I never thought I would say. I realized how much easier it was to not have to deal with the commotion that I could see other students still struggling with. Now, only a few of my other classmates were still free, but it didn’t take long to change that. By the end of week four, a very small percentage had remained out of jail for all four weeks.

All I was able to think about, even after we left our fake scenario, was how horrible that experience was for my mental and physical health. I wanted to scream, cry, and explode in the matter of an hour. I knew that this was not my real life, and that nothing of value was actually depending on my ability to be successful but I still was emotionally exhausted and mentally drained. It was only after we debriefed that it sunk in that this is reality for some people, and it is more than just a classroom game— it’s their livelihoods.

In Winter quarter, I participated as a booth worker who administered “drug tests” to my peers who were role playing as offenders during the simulation. Role playing as a social service administrator allowed me to get a different perspective. I was in charge of setting out small laminated pieces of paper with positive or negative signs on the back. Each time a student would come up, they drew a card at random to see their fate. There were proportionately far more

positive drug test results than negative. Once they pulled their card, it was my job to write down their result on their life card.

While I had no control over exactly what card they drew, I had the power to take breaks, be on my phone, and be generally unhelpful. I was able to have power over the situation while sitting back and watching people who had no idea what to expect flounder and fail. It was oddly satisfying to see realization set into these student's faces that this was a near impossible task, and my job was only to make it more impossible. Similarly, another student who volunteered to staff a booth said:

During the Re-Entry simulation, I really got into my role of having power. At times I forgot that this is real life for some and would laugh at some people who ended up in jail fast. I set bonds extremely high knowing no one would pay for them because they couldn't afford it just because I could. Sometimes I would even walk away from my table and go talk to my friend the probation officer and tell her to send them to me just because we thought it was funny" (Participant 14). I found that power dynamics played a big role in my persona at the booth. I could see sheer panic behind each person's eyes, but I had no motivation to help them regardless of their begging to pass a fake drug test.

As the simulation went on, less and less people decided to try their luck at my booth, allowing me more time for observation.

As the weeks went by, I saw more people walking around slowly, losing motivation, almost waiting to get caught. A booth worker remarked, "As the weeks went on I noticed something very sad: the participants were acting like they gave up. They didn't care whether service was being provided to them or not because the majority of them kept on becoming recidivists every week" (Participant 16). One of the most valuable lessons I learned while working the booth was that even though most of the people in the room had never met or were not close acquaintances, deep bonds quickly formed by sharing a grueling experience. We unpacked the relationships that students formed during their participation, which yielded open

conversation and debate in the debriefing session following the event. I hope students relayed their experience participating in the simulation with their family members, friends, and other students and educators.

Analyzing Student Reflection

Throughout the Spring quarter, I worked with Lena Silberman and Jordyn Ramos to assist Dr. Parrotta with coding student reflection papers on their participation in the reentry simulation. We met virtually on Fridays to discuss our individual progress coding and the patterns that we were seeing across the data. Our coding was based in grounded theory, the:

gathering and analyzing data to generate middle-range theory. [...] Researchers can and should develop theory from rigorous analyses of empirical data. This analytic process consists of coding data; developing, checking, and integrating theoretical categories; and writing analytic narratives throughout inquiry (Charmaz and Belgrave 2015).

In our meetings, we would separate out anonymized papers for each person to code, and then in the following meeting, we would compare similar themes that we found, share examples, and explain our individual reasoning behind the codes.

I coded nine papers individually, and together, we went through 35 papers from students who participated in the simulation from the East coast. When coding individually, I would read through each paper looking for themes and patterns in the students' main responses and reactions. The most common theme across the papers we coded was frustration. Students were especially frustrated by the process and ultimately realized that if they were so vexed over something that they knew was fake, that those actually experiencing reentry are probably more agitated, stressed, and scared. Other codes included "realizations," "hopelessness," "feeling

overwhelmed,” and “anger.” In my experience role playing as a recently released offender, I too, felt this range of feelings.

Many of the respondents reported a shift in thinking about reentry. Students were not aware of hardships people faced and they realized how ineffective the current system is. For example, one student stated,

Soon it started to make sense why they did not follow court orders and their reentry plan. For one, we all know life happens, therefore everything isn't always going to be followed step by step and plan by plan. A lot of times with newly released offenders, everything is so all over the place for them anyway. Also I think the reason they were instructed to not follow court orders and their reentry was to purposely set them up to fail again and end up right back where they started, to me that says a lot about the judicial system we live in (Participant 12).

Being in a scenario like this is a unique and one-of-a-kind experience. Being able to feel emotions that are similar to those in the real life situation changes a point of view quickly.

Participant 12 saw how hectic and crazy a mere simulation could get, applied this to real life and found the flaws within the system.

Hopelessness was another feeling expressed by student participants who went through the reentry simulation. Some participants attempted to steal, create alliances, and others tried flirting with staff at the booths to get by, but as the simulation continued and they did not have the resources available to succeed, some experienced a downward trajectory leading them back to jail. As one participant said:

At first, I remained nice to the staff at each station and even flirted with some to gain access to employment, treatment, and even a positive AA meeting. Later I began to become upset at results at the end of each week, that I had to result to a life of crime, and even partner up with another to steal money from some stations that left for lunch break. I began to see I was not the only one who was loose grip, many stole money and even screamed at staff (Participant 11).

After attempting to “play the game” with the system and failing regardless of your hopeful attempts creates a sense of discouragement, making it all the more difficult to stay positive or keep up with the demands when in fact, any form of attempt may end in returning to jail.

Students also felt overwhelmed during the simulation. The inability to complete tasks in a timely manner caused turmoil for students. Several students reflected upon wanting to get caught so they could return to jail just to have a break. Participant 13 said it best when they confessed:

Honestly, at the start of the fourth week I did not want to leave the jail because I knew I would not complete everything that I was supposed to. Combining that with knowing that my effort does not account for anything, I did not see the point in even wasting my time and energy trying to get everything done.

Like my experience of finding peace in jail, many, like Participant 13, echoed the same. This is an issue because the more appealing jail looks, the more unsuccessful attempts at re entry will be. If those who are released find that jail, where having easy and reliable housing, having no rent costs, unchallenging access to food, and general lack of responsibility is a peaceful place as compared to being out, recidivism will remain high.

Frustration was the most recurring theme found in student reflection papers and it was often coupled with hopelessness and anger. As students’ strategies failed their frustration increased, but it made the reentry process real. One student reflected, “Each week I wasn’t able to complete everything that was on my agenda, therefore I was sent back to jail over and over, which did nothing to make my situation better. This process made me feel very frustrated and annoyed” (Participant 17). Understanding the difficulties of reentering society after being incarcerated is something that not a lot of people think about. Media often portrays people happily escaping or being released, but not the consequent hardships of sustaining life once outside. Being able to experience the frustration and inefficiencies brings reality to the foreground.

The widespread frustration and realization that is found in nearly every response, including mine, is something that will greatly factor into creating change. Having the honor of participating as someone released, as a booth worker, and finally reviewing the reflection papers of other students highlighted the power of the simulation experience for having students understand the reentry process first-hand. Experiencing frustration leads to a change in students' attitudes towards recently released offenders, making them more empathetic. For students interested in the criminal justice field, this simulation is something that can't be taken lightly. These students need to know that they are entering a field that is riddled with inequities and deep-rooted problems. Having this experience is a first step in truly understanding this system from a new viewpoint. Reading the hardships from a textbook or article, even if they are personal anecdotes, is vastly different than experiencing the emotions and process first-hand. A second step is the accompanying empathy that will allow these students to affect change.

RESOURCE DRIVE

Oftentimes, having and obtaining necessary personal items is taken for granted. Through participation in the reentry simulation, I realized how stressful it is to obtain government documents and housing without proper identification, to get around without transportation, and to meet the requirements of probation and parole, while just trying to get back on your feet without support. During my participation in the simulation, I struggled to find the time and resources to obtain essential items that I use every day as a student. Simple human necessities like toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant, and basic clothing items are not administered upon release. While big problems like living situations, finding various offices needed to complete tasks, and obtaining proper identification come to the forefront, small essentials needed to live

fall through the cracks. Giving those who have been released the best chance they can to successfully re-enter society and establish a steady routine by taking something off of their already exhausting, and nearly impossible to-do list seemed like a way I could help.

My initial plan for this capstone was to work with a group of other sociology students to create an item donation drive on campus. As a group, we would identify items that students could easily purchase so that we could make care packages in partnership with Restorative Partners, a non-profit in SLO working on reentry and reintegration. We first had a meeting with Mary from Restorative Partners to determine what items would be realistic and useful to collect and distribute in our care packages. As a group, we decided that we would ask for donations of used backpacks, and items such as shampoo, deodorant, pads/tampons, and hand sanitizer. We worked together to create a flyer for the drive (Appendix A) and I sent messages to members of Greek life and the point of contact for Cal Poly's Change the Status Quo conference seeking help with the donation drive.

Unfortunately, due to asking too late in the Winter quarter, opportunities for partnership had passed. In the future, students should contact student organizations and offices across campus early in the fall. I pitched our drive to one of Dr. Parrotta's classes after explaining the importance of reentry and reintegration. However, despite student interest, we decided not to collect items due to COVID-19.

Over the course of spring break, administration announced we would not be returning to campus for Spring quarter, putting a wrench in our plans. As a team, we agreed we might be able to do a virtual fundraiser to collect monetary donations to purchase items for the care packages. However, due to COVID-19, most items on our donation list were in low stock (showing the essential nature of these items). Due to the pandemic, I was no longer in SLO and with no plans

to return during the quarter, I could not receive the items, create the packages, or deliver them to Restorative Partners. We decided it was unfair to place the burden of receiving packages, sanitizing them, and creating the packages on Restorative Partners. Because this project seemed impossible to complete because of constraints from the shelter in place orders, I decided to alter my original plans, but wanted to remain focused on reentry for my senior project.

I am deeply ashamed to admit that before meeting with Mary, I hadn't thought about the needs of those released past big picture items like housing, transportation, and a job— everything else I assumed would follow. Having these items that are solely mine makes me feel like a real human being—I cannot imagine my life without them. Why shouldn't those released have the same, albeit small, luxuries? To be under the immense stress of figuring out how to live and make it day to day while trying to obtain these highly necessary personal items is something that nobody should face. Planning events is always difficult, but so is reentry. Having to change my project taught me how valuable community ties and support are and the pandemic has also shown me how much I take for granted in my everyday life. I fully intend to continue to help and now I have the know-how to hold something like this in my own community.

CONSTRUCTING COVID-19 & INCARERATION IN CALIFORNIA WEBSITE

During my spring break, every piece of media was bombarded with news surrounding COVID-19— death rates, menacingly increasing rates of contraction, business struggles, and great loss across the board. While thinking about how to complete my senior project virtually, the justice system was in the back of my mind. But it wasn't until I saw in a news article that Jay-Z had donated millions of surgical masks to US prisons and jails that I came up with a new project idea. His act was one of the only pieces of news on how COVID-19 was affecting

incarcerated people that I had seen; despite being bombarded with COVID-19 media non-stop. I looked for articles and couldn't locate an informative and accurate article until the bottom of page one of my Google search, which infuriated me.

How could people know what was going on behind bars and make informed decisions regarding inmate and guard safety and health without access to good information? My disappointment turned into an idea. I decided I wanted to assemble updates about COVID-19 impacting the criminal justice system in one place. My idea for a website was spawned. I would create a website that could be used as a resource to obtain materials as the pandemic unfolded. I scoured the internet for a resource like mine and at the time was not able to find one.

Method

My first step in executing my idea was to create a prototype website on WIX. When accessed, it opened up to a map of the United States and directions that said: "click a state to begin." My vision was for someone to be able to click on a state to receive a collection of up to date articles and government orders. I piloted my ideas by finding a few articles for California, adding them to the California state hyperlink, and sending it to Dr. Parrotta for feedback and approval to move forward with this new project. We decided this aligned with my passions and seemed like a timely contribution. (See Appendix B).

After two weeks of attempting to stay on top of news for each state, I felt like I was making little progress, while dedicating large chunks of my time to my project. I had gotten seven states researched in about 40 hours across two weeks. Google searches returned repeats of mainstream news articles, so filtering for fifty states felt daunting. As a result, I decided to focus solely on California. I created a new website, and this time around, focused on improving the

design and making it more accessible. The main change I made was creating searchable sub-categories of information: 1) Official California Announcements, 2) California News and Articles, and 3) Federal Announcements and News, available by chronological date of publication.

Official California Announcements came from government websites and executive orders. California News and Articles contained updates from major news outlets (e.g. ABC, CNN, LA Times). Finally, in the Federal Announcements and News category, I included news on federal prisons in publication order, keeping official government updates pinned at the top of the page. The goal was to make the website design easy to navigate so people could receive up to date news on how COVID-19 was impacting prisons and jails.

After finalizing my website (See Appendix C), I transferred the materials I initially posted for California on my first website. I assessed the volume of new articles and ultimately decided that I would update weekly (Thursday afternoon or Friday morning) unless there was extremely important breaking news at some point during the week. While I am not an epidemiologist, I used my best discretion to only post things that were above all else accurate, necessary, and informative. To do this, I focused on pieces that had either official statistics cited, actual workers or officials quoted in the article or speaking in a video, or were straight from a governmental document. When investigating mainstream news stories, I checked for the same story across almost every news outlet to cross check the facts between news stations and would decide on the article that had the most factual-based information. If all sources had the same facts, I would read for brevity, interjected opinion, and how many added resources (like videos from the institutions themselves) each had. Of course, if I had found anything to have been even slightly inaccurate at a later date, I would have removed it.

While executing my searches, I first looked for official government announcements, then moved to major news sources, and then checked to see if there were any federal updates. I would do this search every other day, recording URL links to post and publish weekly. I posted fresh links when I found sources updated or changed their information. During week seven of the Spring quarter, my site was getting full, so I decided to purge. At the time, I had posted almost 50 articles, but inevitably, some articles I posted early on were now outdated.

Outcome

As of writing this paper, I have 42 articles posted on the website and am still actively searching, posting, updating, and pruning articles. Unfortunately, updates have slowed to a relative standstill now that the initial panic and novelty have slightly worn off, and the media focus has switched to police brutality following the killing of George Floyd. I intend to continue searching and posting updates as COVID-19 continues to spread behind bars. I believe that my website can be used as a resource even after the pandemic is over, archiving resources to potentially spark conversation on prison conditions and inmates' well-being. I have been sharing my website with family, friends, neighbors, and peers who are interested in this topic, but I would like for the viewership to be more widespread. My hope is to provide a resource for people I do not know, so they can find relevant information compiled in one place if they have a loved one behind bars in California.

In creating this website, I found that factual information is not always accessible or easy to find. More often than not, you are led in circles or only readily exposed to what search engines think is most important. Endless scrolling and clickbait headlines can deter people from finding out what is really going on. A vulnerable population, like the incarceration system, was being

ransacked by a pandemic and got less than the average amount of media coverage. When information like this is pushed to the bottom of the news cycle, it prevents knowledge from spreading. It wasn't until I shared my new project with my friends and family that many of them even knew there was an issue. I remember a friend proudly proclaim: "how can they have a COVID problem in jails, they're separated from the disease".

My intention in compiling this information was to give people the power of knowledge. If a problem isn't known or seen, change and remedy may never occur. I found that though digging through article after article may be difficult and time-consuming, it is worth it for people to have consciousness about problems that aren't easily or readily talked about. Knowing about all problems, especially in an unprecedented situation like this is key— it can inform judicial precedents, official government decisions and livelihoods of people that the problem is affecting.

CONCLUSION

Today, there are over 2.3 million people behind bars (ACLU, 2020). About 95% of these people, or about 2.2 million, will be released at some point (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020; Vance, Richards, and Oliva, 2019; James, 2015; Braga, Piehl, Hureau 2008). If we are not educated and committed to reforming this aspect of the criminal justice system, recidivism will remain high and prisons and jails will remain full. In its current form, incarceration and reentry is a positive feedback loop— they perpetuate each other. Being incarcerated, unless a truly heinous crime is committed, leads to reentry into society. The immediate difficulties and obstacles that those reentering are likely to face create high levels of recidivism. This cycle goes on and on. Without a change, this will last forever and does not benefit anyone in the process.

While knowing the difference between what actions are right and wrong are fundamental to a functioning society, when punishment for wrongdoings includes subsequent exile, societal stigma, and extreme hardship instead of closing disparity gaps, educating, and reforming the system to prevent these wrong doings, something needs to change. Participating in this series of hands-on projects related to reentry has taught me how to advocate and go about this change.

These various projects that I incorporated into my senior capstone project do not only help me increase my empathy and understanding in my everyday life but will help me greatly in my future career. By organizing the drive, I learned about the importance of communication. Being a lawyer requires constant communication with a client, a judge, a jury, and a whole string of people to create a positive outcome. I now know that it is important to speak candidly about what is needed to assist or help rather than to simply assume what is needed from my own experience. Also, understanding how to deal with significant setbacks, like failing to communicate with the school sooner about hosting the event as well as the onset of COVID-19 showed me that no matter how much you want something to go your way and how good your intentions are, things cannot always turn out in your favor. Knowing how to accept and work through failure is a great skill to take with me to both law school and the courtroom.

Lawyers don't always get a glimpse into what happens after their job is done — the case is either won or lost and another takes its place. Participating in all aspects of the simulation gives me a unique glimpse into the consequences of my job. I know that I won't win every case I receive, but the frustration I felt in the initial simulation will stick with me for my entire life. This will drive my motivation to defend clients to the best of my ability. Also, using everything I have learned about reentry, I can try to help prepare them for what is to come, and use the resources that I have to help make the transition smoother once they are released. Also, knowing

how powerful a simulation like this is, I can help host more events similar to this in the future with a great understanding of their impact.

Knowing how to research, vet sources, and compile data is something that I will need to form cases in my career. Sifting for accurate information in a systematic manner to create a brief but informative case is something that will only become second nature with practice, but in coding student responses and compiling content for my website, my practice has already begun.

Understanding and truly learning how to be an effective, strong, and practical lawyer who is able to uphold and defend what is right while implementing change for the better is very important to me. I believe that this includes seeing the full picture of the justice system. The problems surrounding reentry are only a small portion of seeing this whole picture, but what I have learned from this project— how to communicate, how to accept failure, how effectively help people, how to educate, how to research, and how to advocate—will last me a lifetime.

APPENDIX A

COMMUNITY CARE PACKAGES

Item Drive for Recently Released Offenders

Why it's important:

In 2019 more than 4,000 people were released from California prisons and jails. Navigating a prison release is exceptionally challenging, and this is only compounded by the fact that they often have been **stripped of almost all of their possessions**. By providing these care packages we are giving people the bare essentials for survival, and helping them begin their journey towards a more fulfilling future.

Items we are collecting:

Shampoo	Band-aids	Lip Balm
Conditioner	Tweezers	Sunscreen
Body Wash	Socks	Nail Clippers
Toothbrush	Hair Ties	Hair Brush
Toothpaste	Quick Dry Camping Towels	Hand Sanitizer
Floss	Underwear/Boxers	Reusable Water Bottle
Pads/Tampons	Undershirts	Wet Wipes
Deodorant	Shower Shoes	Razors

Turn In:

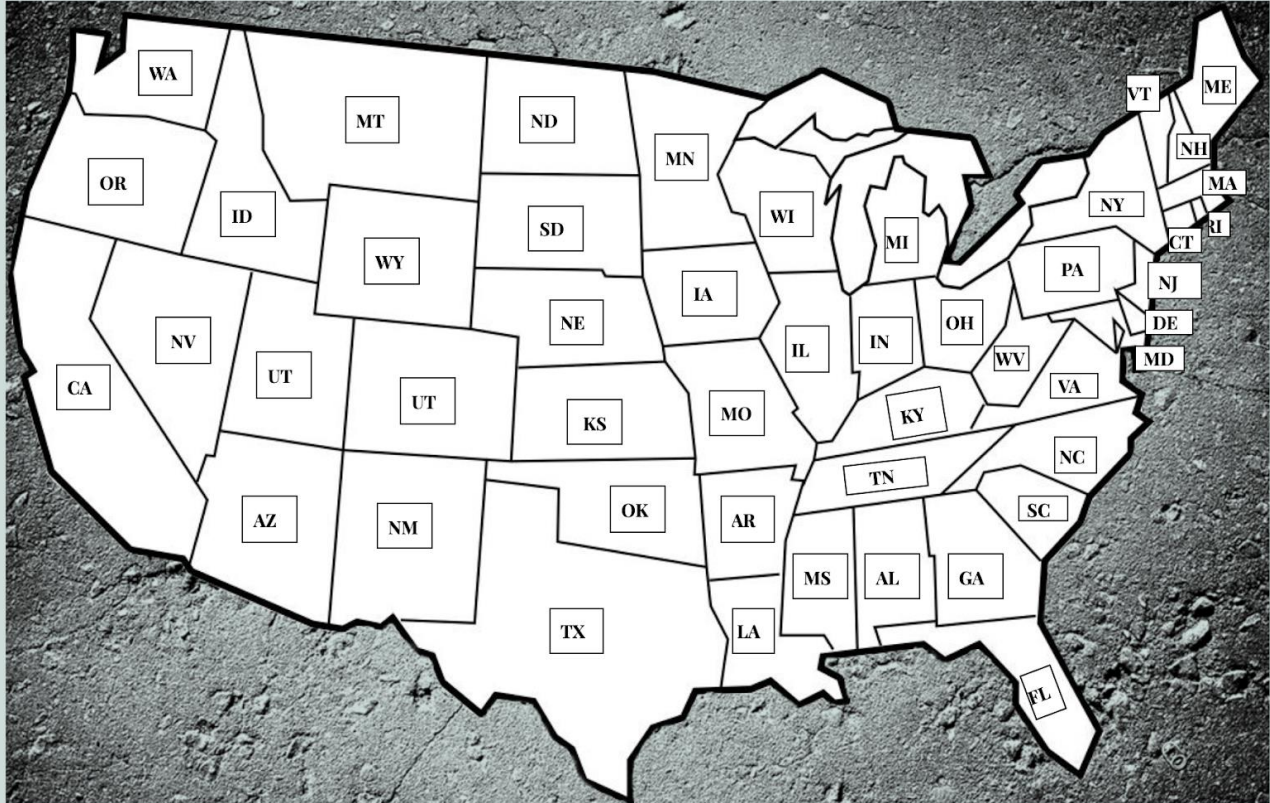
Please turn in your donation items to class on Thursday, at the final exam, or at Dr. P's office hours in 47-13B.

If you have any questions feel free to contact ecook03@calpoly.edu or mpasillas2016@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

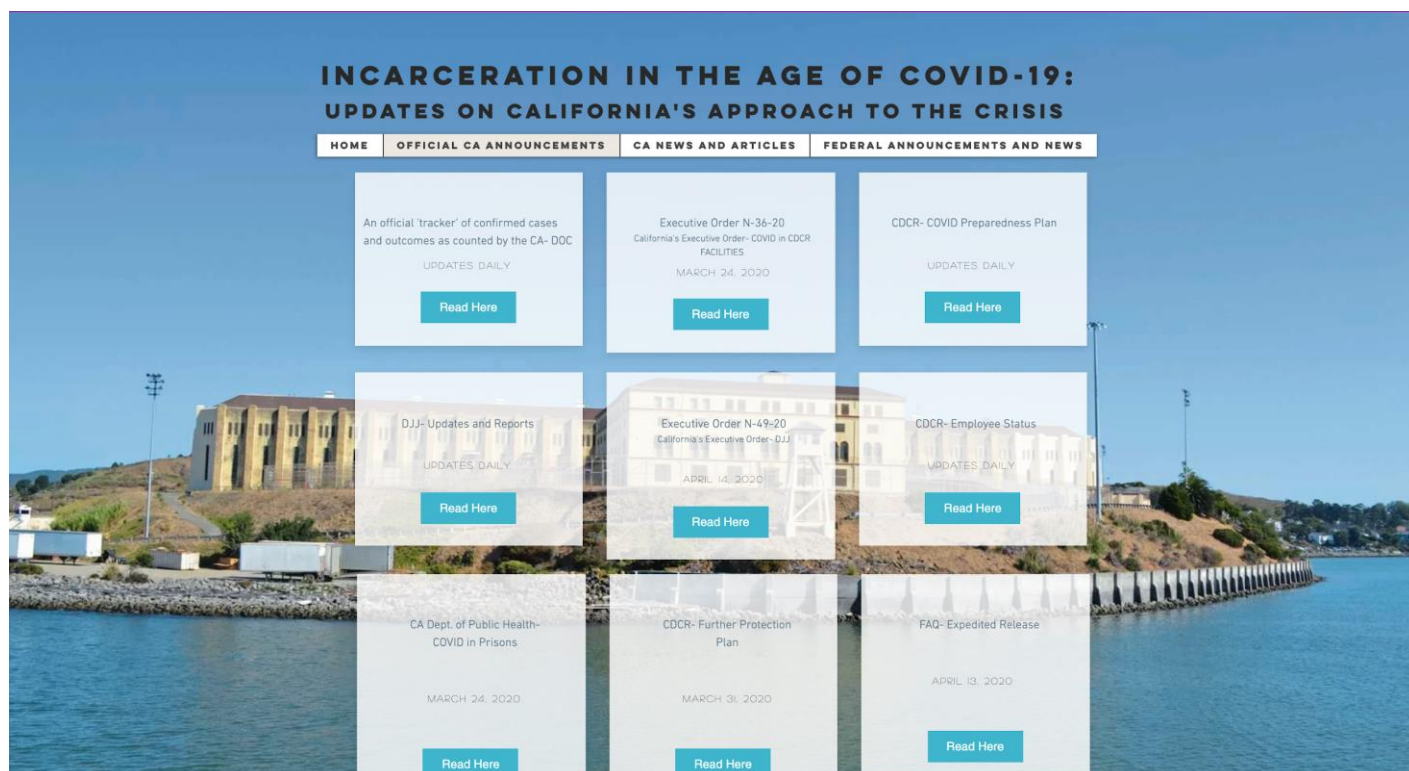
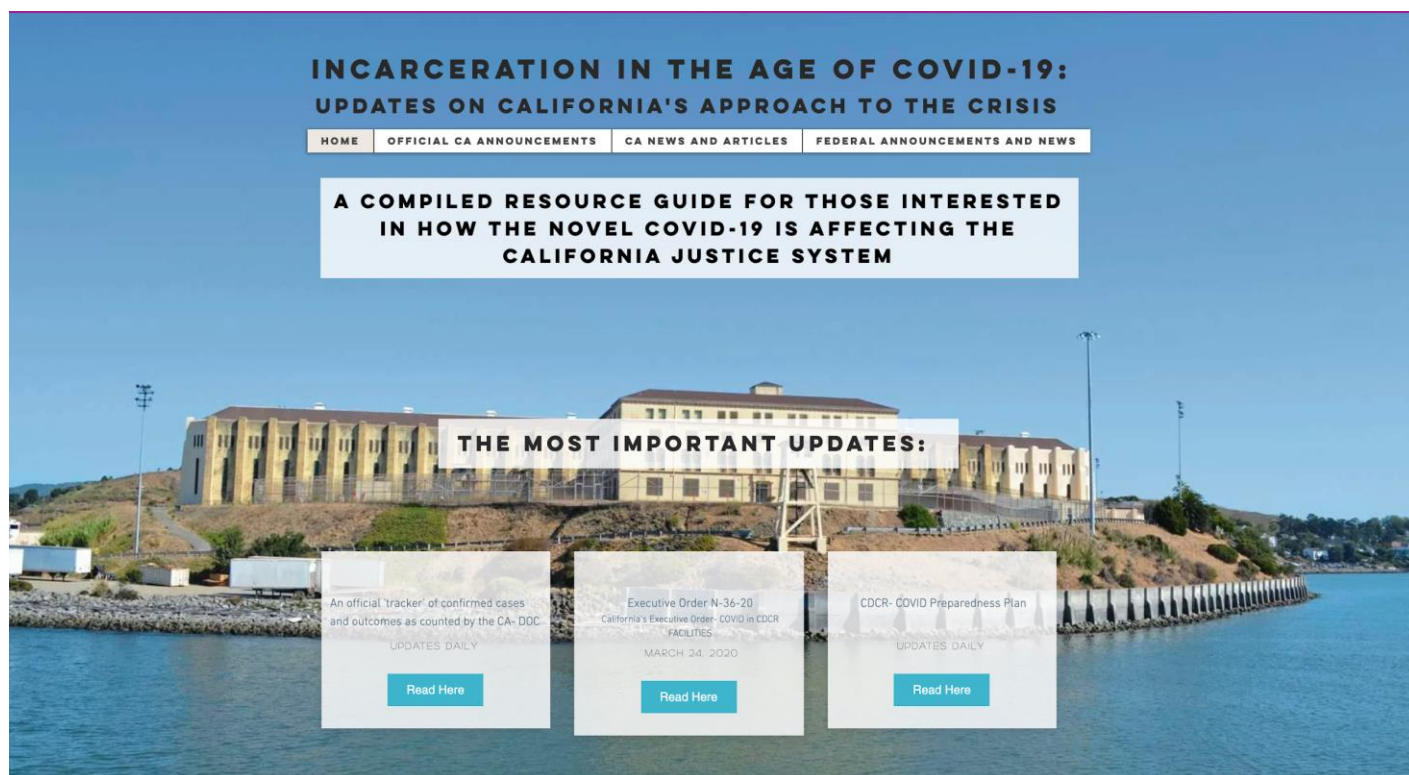
Incarceration in the Age of COVID-19:

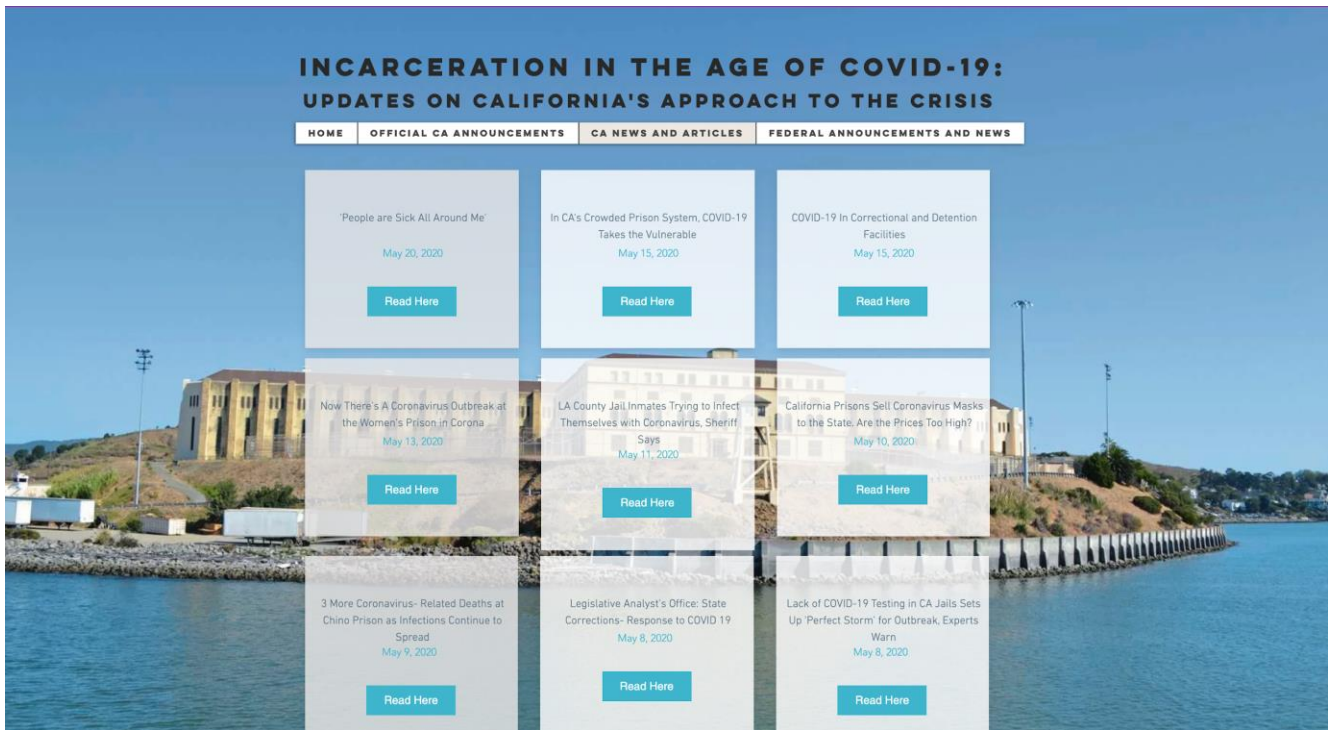
A resource compiling all of the most important articles, data, and action state by state. Click on a state to begin.

[Home](#)[California](#)[Alabama](#)[Alaska](#)[Arizona](#)[Arkansas](#)[Colorado](#)[Connecticut](#)[Delaware](#)[Florida](#)[Georgia](#)[More](#)

APPENDIX C

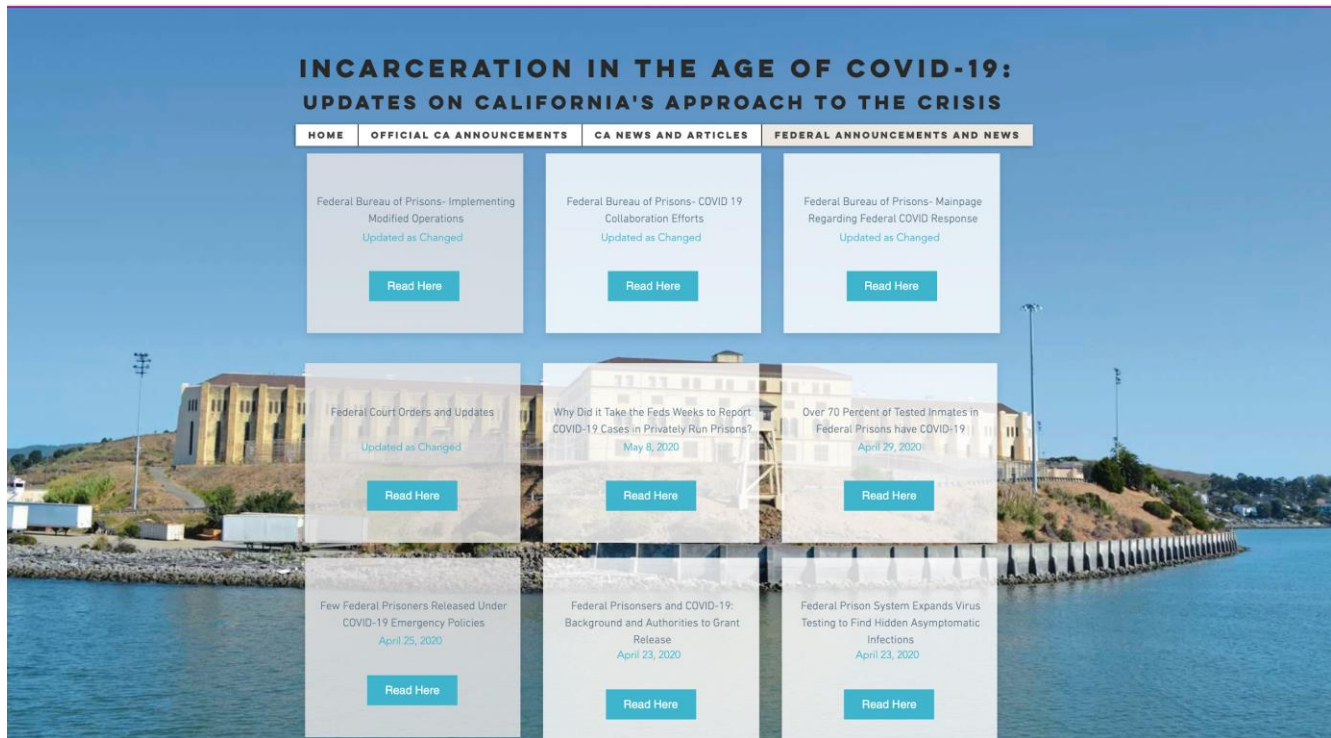
Link to completed website: <https://emilycook103.wixsite.com/srprj2020>





INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COVID-19: UPDATES ON CALIFORNIA'S APPROACH TO THE CRISIS

HOME	OFFICIAL CA ANNOUNCEMENTS	CA NEWS AND ARTICLES	FEDERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS
<p>'People are Sick All Around Me'</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 20, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>In CA's Crowded Prison System, COVID-19 Takes the Vulnerable</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 15, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>COVID-19 in Correctional and Detention Facilities</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 15, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	
<p>Now There's A Coronavirus Outbreak at the Women's Prison in Corona</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 13, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>LA County Jail Inmates Trying to Infect Themselves with Coronavirus, Sheriff Says</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 11, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>California Prisons Sell Coronavirus Masks to the State, Are the Prices Too High?</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 10, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	
<p>3 More Coronavirus-Related Deaths at Chino Prison as Infections Continue to Spread</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 9, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>Legislative Analyst's Office: State Corrections-Response to COVID 19</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 8, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>Lack of COVID-19 Testing in CA Jails Sets Up 'Perfect Storm' for Outbreak, Experts Warn</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 8, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	



INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COVID-19: UPDATES ON CALIFORNIA'S APPROACH TO THE CRISIS

HOME	OFFICIAL CA ANNOUNCEMENTS	CA NEWS AND ARTICLES	FEDERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS
<p>Federal Bureau of Prisons- Implementing Modified Operations</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">Updated as Changed</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>Federal Bureau of Prisons- COVID 19 Collaboration Efforts</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">Updated as Changed</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>Federal Bureau of Prisons- Mainpage Regarding Federal COVID Response</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">Updated as Changed</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	
<p>Federal Court Orders and Updates</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">Updated as Changed</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>Why Did it Take the Feds Weeks to Report COVID-19 Cases in Privately Run Prisons?</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">May 8, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>Over 70 Percent of Tested Inmates in Federal Prisons have COVID-19</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">April 29, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	
<p>Few Federal Prisoners Released Under COVID-19 Emergency Policies</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">April 25, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>Federal Prisoners and COVID-19: Background and Authorities to Grant Release</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">April 23, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	<p>Federal Prison System Expands Virus Testing to Find Hidden Asymptomatic Infections</p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070C0;">April 23, 2020</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Read Here</p>	

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